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ABSTRACT

This bulletin reports the outcome of a short study that investigated the issue of work-related nonadvanced further education (WRNAFE) opportunities for the unemployed, reviews planning strategies for the unemployed, and examines the practices observed in a small selection of local education agencies (LEAs) in Great Britain. Various plans for meeting the needs of the unemployed are summarized, with emphasis on response to community needs, the multiagency approach, flexible programs, staff development, and methods of monitoring and evaluation. Recommendations are made for LEAs, including drawing on a variety of experts' skills, making a comprehensive study of the nature of unemployment, increasing participation by situating training sites near areas of need, taking a multiagency approach, making programs more flexible, and taking a team approach to evaluation of programs for the unemployed. (KC)

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DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN NAFE

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Planning strategies for the unemployed in WRNAFE

FEU project RP311 is designed to examine the curricular impact of The Training Agency/Local Authorities Association NAFE planning arrangements. Earlier bulletins in this series have reported many benefits of collaborative approaches to NAFE planning and delivery. However, during the first two rounds of planning there was some indication that opportunities for the unemployed were not being given due prominence in WRNAFE development plans.

In September 1987, FEU commissioned a short study linked to the main project, specifically to investigate the issue of WRNAFE opportunities for the unemployed. This bulletin reports the outcome of this study, reviews planning strategies for the unemployed and examines the practices observed in a small selection of LEAs.

Geoff Stanton
Chief Officer, FEU

WRNAFE plans for the unemployed

Evidence obtained by studying the project sample of WRNAFE plans suggests that three major factors associated with the planning process may result in a lack of emphasis on provision for the unemployed.

First, the popular method of expressing levels of unemployment in labour market information is to provide raw data on unemployment levels across authority boundaries. This use of crude statistics fails to draw attention to localised areas of particularly high unemployment or the needs of the individual.

Second, the Government's White Paper *Training for Jobs* and the subsequent MSC (now The Training Agency) /LAA agreement on WRNAFE stresses the importance of the alignment of education and training provision to the needs of local employers. Little emphasis is placed on retraining and other approaches designed to satisfy the perceived needs of the adult unemployed.

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The third factor is the use of the Training Occupations Classification (TOC) as the cornerstone of WRNAFE planning and monitoring. LEA plans in the second round of planning tended to become alphabetically assembled from TOC A (Administrative and Clerical) to TOC X (Engineering). Cross-category issues such as unemployment, special needs and equal opportunities were often demoted to a single omnibus chapter towards the end of the plan.

However, a few plans contain a strategy to identify overall community needs, including the unemployed, and some plans and annual programmes outline various schemes to meet these needs.

The nature of the required response to the unemployed sector of the labour market and some practical ways in which LEAs and their colleges have met this requirement are described in the following sections.

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Response to community needs

Long-term unemployment in urban areas, caused by a structural imbalance in the labour market, presents special problems to WRNAFE planning teams—*Development Planning in NAFE Bulletin No. 1* (FEU, February 1986) explained the different forms of market imbalance. Advantages can be gained from utilising the skills and knowledge of all departments of the local authority to obtain a comprehensive picture of unemployment. Areas of particular need can be highlighted by the use of such inputs.

STUDY A

A predominantly urban area has an overall rate of unemployment well above the national average. Within the boundaries of the local authority there are a few pockets of exceptionally high unemployment (above 20%). Some housing estates have had two generations of families without work. A local culture has developed to accommodate the alternative, and probably deprived, lifestyle of these families. For them, being unemployed has become the norm rather than an exceptional way of life. Statistics produced by the Department of Employment suggest that, despite national trends, the localised problem of unemployment in this area is not improving.

A concentrated and co-ordinated effort has been made by several departments of the local authority to assemble a comprehensive picture of the unemployed community. A Community Liaison Committee operates an ESG-funded network for collecting and compiling data. The primary outputs from this activity are reports to the authority's NAFE planning group and to senior management of the further education college.

An early initiative resulting from networking activities was the establishment of meetings in which staff from various departments of the authority were able to make personal contact with potential clients. Participants were drawn equally from the unemployed community and the rest of the authority. The view which emerged from the unemployed was that the FE college is a highly structured environment attuned to the needs of the academically successful while they, the long-term unemployed, had lost the habit of learning. Other factors such as course fees, inflexible hours and travel costs also appeared to act as disincentives to college attendance. This reaffirmed the 'barrier to access' problem.

This study illustrates the defensive attitudes that can accompany longer term structural unemployment. To clients who are 'out of touch' with learning, the FE college seems remote and irrelevant to the needs of the adult unemployed. Measures are necessary to create a network that reaches out to unemployed sectors of the community. Taking the college to the unemployed enhances its community role.

The development of 'open access workshops' allows an approach that addresses several problems at the same time:

- to deliver skill training of value to the world of work;
- to build confidence and provide social skills and abilities;
- to remove perceived barriers to education and training, for example by offering flexible hours;
- to provide advice and guidance to the unemployed client;
- to facilitate two-way communication so that staff, including WRNAFE planners, gain social insights into unemployment.

In summary, the 'open workshop' combines WRNAFE with an important social function in the community.

The multi-agency approach

Some of the problems faced by authorities in planning strategies for the unemployed in WRNAFE can be partly resolved by the use of multi-agency teams. At a time when authorities and voluntary agencies trying to make provision for the adult unemployed are faced with financial restraints, benefits are to be obtained from co-ordinating planning strategies.

STUDY B

One large shire county has a complex pattern of urban and rural environments. Within this pattern are areas of high and relatively low unemployment. Some parts of the county show encouraging signs of economic regeneration while other parts are developing long-term unemployment problems due to a structural imbalance between the existing skill base and industrial needs.

Multi-agency teams, including the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), rural agencies, Careers Service, Rural Community Council, enterprise agencies and LEA staff, have been established for each geographic sector of the county. The teams meet regularly and, through

their contact with unemployed adults, identify strictly local needs so that appropriate programmes can be designed and delivered.

The reports from area teams conform to a standard pattern and include up-to-date statements of unemployment by ward and an indication of the present and future needs of industry. The teams examine the age-banding of the unemployed and determine the most appropriate curriculum for each age band.

The authority recognises the need for the design and delivery of courses for the unemployed, but also encourages the use of other opportunities in the continuing education system.

Problems of access are due to the lack of good public transport within this large county. The authority has responded to the special problems in its rural areas by establishing the outreach centres advocated in *Development Planning in NAFE Bulletin No. 4*, 'WRNAFE in the Rural Context' (FEU, September 1987), and by providing a limited minibus service.

This study shows how well-organised multi-agency teams can be used effectively to provide feedback to the planning authority. They are able to influence provision by enhancing:

- communication between interested parties;
- co-operation in the design of courses;
- collaboration in the delivery of the designed provision.

The teams place great emphasis on the importance of educational guidance. Special programmes are provided for the unemployed, but integration of these schemes within the overall continuing education system is considered essential – without losing the particularity of the response. All agencies contribute to the development of a coherent programme.

The authority, by reporting numbers of unemployed in each area and examining the age-banding of the unemployed, can help determine what provision might be made. The 16-18 age group spends little time on the unemployment register because of other forms of training provision, whereas the 18-25 age group is seen as being more in need of some form of return to education. Older age groups require a more specialised form of provision because of such factors as family commitments and because they frequently appear demoralised. Financial insecurity, loss of self-esteem and reduced social status need to be overcome by programmes designed to help the unemployed cope with their situation and assist them to return to gainful employment.

Flexible provision

The traditional structure and administration of FE does not lend itself readily to provision for the adult unemployed, in terms of either ease of access or length of course, both of which raise barriers to participation. A more flexible approach to provision allows the client to be directed, after initial counselling, into a suitable area of skill training, supported, if necessary, by a literacy and numeracy programme.

STUDY C

One relatively small county has a large central urban population and a rural hinterland. Dramatic changes in unemployment levels have occurred because of an overdependence upon a small number of very large industrial concerns affected by recession.

The county has recognised that, since individuals become unemployed at different times during the year, the concept of a fixed starting date for courses is inconsistent with attempts to help unemployed people.

As a result of their experiences with SCOPE and Restart programmes, the authority has responded with the modularisation of some programmes. Enquiries received from clients and an employer (the Area Health Authority Nursing School) have led to the development of an open entry course for mature students wishing to enter the nursing profession. A learning package has been developed for students. Students and staff negotiated the course content from this package. Students were supported during the course of study and elected to take the professional nursing entry examination when they felt sufficiently prepared. Successful students have returned to other supportive study programmes in the interval between passing the examination and entering nursing school.

This study shows how an authority, by the adoption of a more client-centred approach combined with the will to offer a flexible mode of provision, can assist a particular sector of the adult unemployed. Recognition of skill shortage in the labour market and effective employer participation were prerequisites to the successful design and delivery of the course.

Rolling programmes of study, such as those supported by this authority, require careful initial guidance for participants to ensure entry to the course at the most suitable point. Basic study and coping skills are needed to complement the negotiated specific skill training. The provision of such guidance at outreach centres overcomes many of the problems associated with the college campus and proves especially helpful in areas where unemployment is significantly greater than the average for the county.

Staff development

Staff development units operating within FE institutions offer a range of courses and programmes to assist staff members to cope with the many aspects of the curriculum for the unemployed. Staff development officers respond to the perceived needs of staff by developing programmes, with contents determined by teachers and other members of staff involved with course provision.

STUDY D

A multi-college authority has appointed a member of staff in each of its institutions to be responsible for developing courses for the adult unemployed. Each course is supported by a design team made up of participating staff members. Feedback from these teams has shown the need for a staff development programme.

The programme which emerged deals specifically with:

- the context of unemployment;
- sources of help;
- external funding;
- marketing approaches to design;
- evaluation;
- advice and guidance;
- administration and publicity.

This programme encouraged teaching staff to:

- take a proactive stance in the establishment of new courses;
- become involved in the management of courses;
- take responsibility for marketing, needs analysis, publicity and recruitment to courses.

The authority thus helped to equip staff with new skills which have benefited the institutions, as well as encouraging them to look outside the colleges to opportunities in the local community. It is developing the programme to make it available to a wider range of agencies and providers involved in adult training.

In many parts of the country, FE institutions are making increased provision for the adult unemployed and, at the same time, facing many other challenges to their normal pattern of operation and working practices. Demographic trends are resulting in a greatly reduced number of young people leaving school. Changes in the mode of attendance of students released from industry indicate the need for a significant change of approach and attitude to education and training. The staff development needed to provide help and support to those involved with the adult unemployed has many common features to that demanded by curricular changes in FE.

The use of well-designed staff development programmes which encourage attendance by all sectors of the college community allows efficient management of scarce resources and benefits all participants by the sharing of experiences.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are processes by which information can be collected and communicated to assist in the making of informed judgements on particular programmes.

These processes are not new to FE, but have assumed a higher profile since the Audit Commission report in 1985 in which the need to measure 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' was stressed. Their application to the provision of courses for the unemployed raises particular problems.

STUDY E

This study reports on the approach made by one authority to the problems and benefits of carrying out a system of course monitoring and evaluation. The authority attempted to satisfy the demand for accountability and the need for quality control mechanisms. The resulting feedback to college management provided a basis for modification or even a major change in working practices.

The authority recognised that the application of purely quantitative measures to courses for the unemployed, while of great value, could overlook ways in which such courses could enrich and enhance the lives of the unemployed. Qualitative measures were difficult to obtain because of their subjective and anecdotal nature. However, they yielded more positive outcomes which were incorporated into summative reports, often as case studies, sometimes indicating the percentage of students expressing satisfaction with various elements of the course.

The 'course team' was selected as being the most effective instrument to achieve the objectives of the evaluation process, which were that the courses under examination should:

- be open and accessible to new clients by the identification and addressing of particular needs;
- allow progress to new opportunities by providing knowledge and skills and, where applicable, qualifications.

The exercise showed how all parties involved in courses for the adult unemployed can benefit from the process of course evaluation.

These parties include:

- the client, who is centrally involved in the process;
- the team, which requires an indication of the effectiveness of the course;
- management, which needs to relate outcomes to resource allocation;
- the funding agency, which is entitled to ask if its investment is fulfilling the aims for which it was intended.

Information for evaluation was provided by building in standard monitoring procedures during course design. Induction, continuing review and final review sessions formed part of the normal classroom activity. Informal logging of day-to-day data provided a very useful source of information which was collated at the end of the course. Formal procedures were employed to include statistical information and data obtained by questionnaires and interviews.

This study illustrates an approach to monitoring and evaluation. The 'course team', to be effective, should be resourced to allow time for both reflection and structured analysis of course activities. This is particularly important when individual members of staff are involved with more than one course team.

Communication with students must be a two-way process in order to determine their needs and log observations for later study by the team. Staff development clearly assisted the team to acquire the interrogation and research skills to carry out the monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Towards good practice

Labour markets in general, and unemployment dimensions in particular, vary considerably across the country. For this reason, no fixed set of recommendations will be appropriate nationally. LEAs need to take account of local circumstances when developing their strategy for WRNAFE opportunities for the unemployed.

However, a number of pointers towards good practice have emerged from this study:

- The skills and expertise of the many agencies involved with the unemployed should be used when WRNAFE development plans are drawn up. In particular, REPLAN field officers who have the skills and experience to deal with the problems of developing educational opportunities for the adult unemployed should be invited to assist the planning authority in preparing strategic plans and programmes.
- A comprehensive study of the complex nature of unemployment within authority boundaries could, with advantage, be included in future development plans. Statistics alone provide an inadequate planning base.
- Education and training facilities sited at locations within the community which show greatest evidence of need are likely to increase participation rates among the unemployed.
- A multi-agency approach to the development of coherent course programmes of education and training for the unemployed has proved to be very effective.
- Initiatives which aim to develop more flexible forms of provision in response to the unpredictable nature of demand from the unemployed should be supported.
- Staff development initiatives, initially designed for college staff, should be extended to include staff from other agencies making provision for the adult unemployed.
- Provision for the unemployed should be subjected to an efficient process of monitoring—preferably conducted by a course evaluation 'team'.

Requests for additional copies of this bulletin should be addressed to the FEU Information Centre, telephone 01-321 0433.

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